



Kansai

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Best Places to Eat

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Best Temples & Shrines

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- Tōdai-ji (p389)

Why Go?

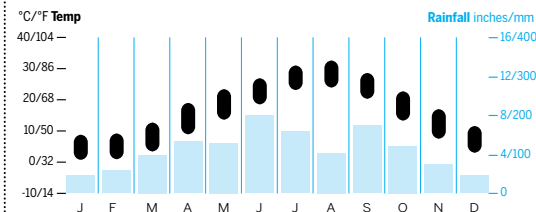
If you had to choose only one region of Japan to explore, Kansai (関西) would be an easy choice. It's the heart of Japan; nowhere else in the country can you find so much of historical and cultural interest in such a compact area.

Osaka, the region's hub and Japan's third largest city, shows off Japanese urban life in all its mind-boggling intensity, while Kōbe retains some of the international feeling that dates back to its days as a foreign treaty port. Nara, Japan's first permanent capital, is thick with traditional sights, including Japan's largest Buddha at the awe-inspiring Tōdai-ji Temple. In Mie Prefecture, Ise Grand Shrine is one of the three most important sites in Shintō, while in Wakayama-ken there are great hiking and onsen (hot springs), a rugged coastline and the mountaintop Buddhist temple complex of Kōya-san, one of Japan's most intensely spiritual places.

Kyoto and Osaka are the main cities of Kansai and both make good bases for exploration.

When to Go

Osaka



Late Mar–mid Apr The beauty of the cherry blossoms is over the top.

May–Sep July and August are hot and sticky, but summer is a great time to explore.

Oct–early Dec Kansai's sights are sublime against a backdrop of bright red maple leaves.



Kansai Highlights

- 1 Gazing in awe at the **Great Buddha** (p389) at Nara's Tōdai-ji.
- 2 Feasting your eyes on the colourful human parade of Osaka's **Dōtombori area** (p356).
- 3 Feeling the power radiating from the main hall of

- Ise-jingū** (p418), Japan's most sacred Shintō shrine.
- 4 Wandering the mystical forest of Kōya-san's **Oku-no-in** (p409).
- 5 Soaking in the restorative waters of the three onsen at **Hongū** (p417).

- 6 Walking the ancient pilgrimage trails of Wakayama's **Kumano Kodō** (p414).
- 7 Donning a *yukata* (light cotton kimono) and strolling from onsen to onsen in the quaint town of **Kinosaki** (p422).